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ABSTRACT

President Bush's America 2000 strategy, like the Education Reform Act of 1988 adopted by Prime Minister Thatcher's government in the United Kingdom, seeks to make education accountable to the marketplace. Both programs promote school choice, site-based management, and national control of curriculum and assessment. British studies have shown that academic standards are not a top priority in parental decision making and that parents tend to choose schools in relatively homogeneous areas. Another potential problem is that choice may be used as a kind of sorting process that indirectly screens out less advantaged students. Although school choice and site-based management imply greater individual freedom, national control of the curriculum is an attempt to direct the choice of parents and educators toward the achievement of national economic goals. Carefully designed choice programs should be evaluated and modified to avoid harm and increase benefits, especially for the least advantaged members of society. (Contains 46 references.) (LMI)

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Making Education Accountable to the Marketplace: What Can Be Learned from Cross-National Comparisons Between the United States and the United Kingdom?

by

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Abstract

President Bush's America 2000 strategy, like the Education Reform Act of 1988 adopted by Prime Minister Thatcher's government in the United Kingdom, seeks to make education accountable to the marketplace. Both programs promote school choice, site-based management and national control of curriculum and assessment. While school choice and site-based management imply greater individual freedom, national control of the curriculum is an attempt to direct the choices of parents and educators toward the achievement of national economic goals. Americans can learn much from the large scale social experiment on which the United Kingdom has embarked.

Biographical Statement

John Maddaus is an assistant professor in the College of Education at the University of Maine at Orono. He currently conducts research on town tuitioning, a practice which allows over 5500 high school students and their parents in almost 100 rural towns in Maine to choose their high school from among non-sectarian private academies and public high schools in other towns.

Introduction

On April 18, 1991, President George Bush introduced his America 2000 strategy to achieve the national educational goals which he and the nation's governors had agreed upon in early 1990. America 2000: An Education Strategy declares, "eight years after the National Commission on Excellence in Education declared us a 'Nation at Risk',... (a)lmost all our education trend lines are flat." It points out that "we're spending far more money on education.... But the results have not improved..." And it adds that "serious efforts at educational improvement are under way by most of our international competitors and trading partners.... American students are at or near the back of the pack in international comparisons. If we don't make radical changes, that is where they're going to stay" (U.S. Department of Education, 1991, p. 15).

There appears to be broad agreement across party lines in the nation's capital that American schools as they now exist are producing graduates ill-equipped to meet the challenges of the nation's future. But there is no agreement at this time on the most appropriate strategies to address this problem. Three major education reform bills have been introduced in Congress as of this writing.

Senate bill 1141 (hereafter S. 1141), including major elements of the President's strategy, was introduced in the U.S. Senate on May 23, 1991 by a bipartisan group of senators at the request of the Bush administration. S. 1141

offers Federal resources to states for specified activities, including restructuring schools, promoting parental choice of both public and private schools, and expanding testing of students in the core academic subjects of English, mathematics, science, history and geography.

Senate bill 2 (S. 2), was introduced by 30 Democratic Senators on January 14, 1991, and was reported out of the Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee on April 17th. It was then held from the floor awaiting discussions with the Bush administration. S. 2 contains a restructuring proposal, along with programs for curriculum development and technological innovation in mathematics and science education, but does not address parental choice or testing.

House of Representatives bill 3320 (H.R. 3320) was introduced by the chairman (a Democrat) and the ranking minority member (a Republican) on the Committee on Education and Labor, along with the chairman (also a Democrat) of the Subcommittee on Elementary, Secondary and Vocational Education, on September 12, 1991. H.R. 3320 sets up a planning process for states and localities, and delegates decisions on curriculum and assessment to those levels. It offers funding to localities for a variety of activities specified in state and local plans, including school restructuring and choice programs "consistent with state law and state constitutions" (p. 11).

These three bills, each addressing the national education goals, differ over whether to accept one of the

basic, underlying assumptions of the America 2000 strategy: the idea that educational outcomes will improve dramatically only if schools become accountable to the marketplace. Only S. 1141 fully endorses that assumption, and seeks to make it the basis of national educational policy. H.R. 3320 would encourage states and localities to try out local variations on the major components of the America 2000 strategy -- school choice, school restructuring and standardization of curriculum and assessment -- singly or in combination. S. 2 endorses only the school restructuring concept.

In its unequivocal commitment to the notion of making education accountable to the marketplace, the Bush strategy for an educational revolution bears a strong resemblance to the Education Reform Act of 1988 (for England and Wales), which former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and her Secretary of State for Education, Kenneth Baker, pushed through Parliament. The objectives of the British educational reform have been summarized as follows:

> to create a 'social market' in education, establish a national curriculum and testing system, make education more responsive to economic forces and attract more non-public funding. It is asserted that if achieved these mechanisms would raise standards, increase consumer choice and make the whole system, including higher education, more accountable (Tomlinson, 1988).

This paper compares America 2000 and the Education Reform Act of 1988, and attempts to draw from the British experience with market oriented educational reforms those lessons which may be significant for those considering the adoption of such reforms in the United States. We begin with an overview of the parallel histories of educational reform in the two countries since the 1960s. Next, we examine the similarities and differences between to two reform plans. Then, we examine the research on parental choice in Britain and the United States, including the first research being conducted in England following implementation of the Education Reform Act of 1988. The paper concludes with recommendations regarding the policy options facing American political leaders and citizens.

History of Parental Choice Initiatives

From relatively modest beginnings almost three decades ago (Friedman, 1962; West, 1965), the idea of an educational system controlled by market forces has gained widespread public recognition, if not universal acceptance, on both sides of the Atlantic. In the 1960s and early 1970s, the primary emphasis of educational policy was the promotion of equality of educational opportunity. In the United States, policy-makers focused on school desegregation and the War on Poverty. British policy-makers struggled over whether to retain selective secondary schools, known as grammar schools, or convert to seemingly more egalitarian comprehensive high schools (Heidenheimer, Heclo and Adams,

1975). In both countries, some middle class families resisted the new egalitarian policies, claiming that the quality of education was deteriorating.

Since the mid-1970s, the primary emphasis of the educational policy debate has shifted. In both countries, political leaders of both major parties have focused attention on the declining positions of their respective countries relative to the countries of continental Europe and eastern Asia in an increasingly competitive global economy. In educational policy debates, politicians, business leaders and conservative think tanks have stressed academic excellence as a means to economic competitiveness, rather than equity.

In the United Kingdom, the Conservative Party adopted the concept of parental choice in the mid-1970s, in part in response to the concerns of middle class parents interested in maintaining access to selective grammar schools (Glenn, 1989). Upon the party's return to power in 1979, the concept of choice was incorporated in education legislation for England and Wales (1980) and Scotland (1981). Despite greater interest in parental choice in England, the Act for Scotland actually gave greater leverage to those parents who wanted a school other than their neighborhood school. The 1980 Act for England and Wales required that local school districts -- known as local education authorities or LEAs -- admit children to the school chosen by their parents unless one of several, rather broad, statutory exceptions existed

(most notably, "if compliance with the preference would prejudice the provision of efficient education or the efficient use of resources"). This allowed LEA officials to take into account conditions in the designated as well as the requested school. On the other hand, the 1981 Act for Scotland was more restrictive of the LEAs' powers, allowing them to deny a parental request only on the basis of conditions at the school being requested. Parents in Scotland also had the right of appeal (which English and Welsh parents lacked) to the local sheriff, an official independent of the LEA. The sheriff's responsibility was to determine whether any of the more specific reasons for denial of a request (such as lack of space at the requested school) actually existed (Adler, Petch and Tweedie, 1989, p. 50). These acts laid the groundwork for enrollment provisions of the Education Reform Act 1988 which further restricted the LEAs' powers.

Conservative political leaders in the United Kingdom, especially Thatcher's Secretary of State for Education from 1981 to 1986, Sir Keith Joseph, have also given serious consideration to a more radical mechanism for parental choice: educational vouchers. Local politicians in Kent County conducted a feasibility study which found that 72% of parents said they should be allowed a voucher for private schools, although only 10% said they would transfer their children initially (Seldon, 1986). But the idea was dropped, in part because the government at that time was primarily

concerned with reducing education expenditures (Petty, 1986).

While the United Kingdom moved toward adoption of legislation in 1988 which established open enrollment throughout England and Wales (with variations under related legislation in Scotland and Northern Ireland), a patchwork of school choice programs emerged in the United States based primarily on state and local initiatives. Pending the outcome of the debate over President Bush's America 2000 strategy, the only uniform national policy in the United States regarding parental choice is the program of federal subsidies for magnet schools that arose out of desegregation efforts in the 1970s.

The first major U.S. initiative to prmote parental choice was the Alum Rock (San Jose, CA) public school voucher demonstration program, sponsored by the Nixon Administration (Weiler, 1974). However, evidence from Alum Rock that parents were more likely to base their choices on school location than on academic quality (Bridge, 1978; Bridge and Blackman, 1978) led to a loss of interest in the voucher concept. John Coons and Stephen Sugarman attempted to put a regulated voucher initiative on the California election ballot in 1980, but feel short of obtaining the needed signatures (Coons and Sugarman, 1978; Catterall, 1982). The Reagan administration was unable to convince Congress to adopt either its tuition tax credit proposal in 1982 or its compensatory education voucher proposal in 1985.

Beginning in the 1970s, however, magnet schools based on choice emerged as a major tool for achieving school desegregation. Since the mid-1980s, at least half of the 50 states have adopted some form of parental choice of school legislation, usually restricted to choice among public schools. These state programs included inter- and intra-district open enrollment plans, "second chance" programs for high school drop-outs, and post-secondary enrollment option plans. As President Reagan prepared to turn over the presidency to Vice President Bush, both men reiterated their commitment to school choice, while saying little about private schools (Paulu, 1989).

Controversy over the role of private schools in school choice plans was reignited in 1990 by two events. The first was the adoption by the State of Wisconsin of a school choice program which provides state funding for children of low income families in the City of Milwaukee to attend non-sectarian private schools. The second was the publication by the Brookings Institution of Politics, Markets and America's Schools by John Chubb and Terry Moe. This book attributes the problems of public education to control by politicians and bureaucrats, ties the idea of an educational marketplace to the research on effective schools, and advocates a market-oriented educational system very similar to that proposed earlier by Coons and Sugarman.

Comparison of the Bush and Thatcher Plans

A comparison of the Bush proposals (U.S. Department

of Education, 1991; U.S. Senate, 1991b) and the Thatcher program (Haviland, 1988; Leonard, 1988; Maclure, 1988; Walford, 1990) reveals broad similarities based on a shared set of beliefs regarding school organization, educational outcomes and economic competitiveness. Significant differences also exist, attributable in part to the greater centralization of British political institutions (Heidenheimer, Heclo and Adams, 1975) and to the greater prevalence of child-centered educational traditions in British schools (Smith, 1976). The following analysis of the Bush and Thatcher programs focuses on their three major elements: Parental choice of school (known as "open enrollment" in the U.K.), site-based management ("local management of schools" in the U.K.), and curriculum and assessment.

Parental choice of school: President Bush's proposed legislation, S. 1141, and Prime Minister Thatcher's Education Reform Act of 1988 both promote parental choice, but they do so in ways that reflect the different institutional arrangements in the two countries. In the United States, the national government provides less than 10% of total educational revenues through categorical aid and competitive grant programs to state and local governments. This funding pattern would continue under S. 1141, Title V, which incorporates three distinct approaches. Part B of Title V would modify the existing Chapter 1 program to "ensure that children receiving Chapter 1

services do not lose those services when they participate in an educational choice program". Part C creates a categorical aid program for states and localities "under which parents select the school, including private schools, in which their children will be enrolled". Part D creates a competitive grant program to fund model choice programs. The United States Constitution has been interpreted as requiring separation of church and state in educational matters. Both S. 1141 and H.R. 3320 leave the question of the use of public funds to finance enrollment in sectarian schools to judicial interpretation under federal and state constitutions.

In the United Kingdon, where the national government provides most of the operating funds for local schools, policy-making authority delegated to local government in 1944 was reclaimed by the national government in 1988. Sections 26-32 of the 1988 Act require that parents be given the opportunity to send their children to whatever state supported school they may prefer as long as space is available. Each school was assigned a "standard number" under the 1980 Education Act which determines building capacity for open enrollment purposes. Voluntary aided schools (i.e. church-sponsored schools receiving public funds) are allowed to preserve their religious "character" with respect to enrollment. The United Kingdom has long funded church-sponsored schools, and the 1988 Act seeks to continue the government's cooperative relationship with

church authorities.

Site-based management: Both Bush and Thatcher plans seek to promote school-based decision-making with input from the private sector, in the hope of bringing about school improvement. The Bush strategy, because of the limited Constitutional authority of the national government with respect to education, seeks to achieve restructuring through a series of incentives (grants and deregulation), the impact of which may vary greatly from school to school. "New America schools" in "America 2000 communities" are the centerpiece of the Bush plan. These "high-performance" schools, one in each congressional district plus two additional for each state, would serve as national models of excellence (U.S. Department of Education, 1991, pp. 25-28). Under Title I of S. 1141, each new school would receive a start-up grant not to exceed $1 million. President Bush is asking business leaders to contribute $150 million to $200 million to the New America Schools Development Corporation, which will contract with research and development teams. The R&D teams will set aside traditional assumptions about schooling in an effort to help the 535 "new America schools" achieve the national goals. It is unclear whether "new America schools" would also be schools of choice.

Bush would also seek to promote site-based management through three other provisions of S. 1141. Title II would provide $100 million dollars for "merit schools" that make notable progress toward national educational goals. Title

IV would grant waivers from Federal education law and regulations to states, school districts and individual schools that apply for them, thus "increasing their flexibility in the use of their resources while holding them accountable for achieving educational gains". And Part B of Title III of S. 1141 would create Governors' academies for school leaders, in part to provide training for school restructuring. It is unclear to what extent these restructuring provisions would affect the powers of states and school districts over individual schools.

The British reform legislation, on the other hand, mandates school based management for all schools. It pursues its market-oriented reforms by stripping away much of the traditional authority of local education authorities (LEAs) and distributing those powers to parents, governing boards of individual schools, and to the central government's Department of Education and Science (DES). Sections 33-51 of the 1988 Act give the governing boards of individual schools major new responsibilities for managing their own budgets. Since the Act ties school-based decision-making directly to enrollment and parental choice through the school funding formula, opportunities to adjust expenditures in ways that may attract more students can result in increased revenues.

The 1988 Act also creates two other institutional arrangements that involve site-based management. Sections 52-104 contain provisions relating to a new category of schools, called grant maintained schools, which would become

totally independent of their present LEAs upon an affirmative vote of parents and approval by the Department of Education and Science. All subsequent government funding would come directly from DES. In addition, Section 105 provides for city technology colleges, which are designed to attract financial support from private industry in order to create model programs of education in science and technology, as well as technology and the arts.

Curriculum and assessment: Conservative politicians in both countries view standardization of the curriculum as an essential step to greater accountability and higher achievement. In the United States, control of the curriculum itself would be left in the hands of states and/or local districts, although the national government would gain indirect but powerful influence over curriculum content. The National Education Goals Panel, made up of top Federal officials and several of the nation's governors, would sponsor the development of "world class standards" and national tests based on those standards. The tests would be given at the fourth, eighth and twelfth grade levels in five subjects: English, math, science, history and geography. Accountability is to be achieved through publication of test scores in school, school district and state "report cards", in the belief that "if standards, tests and report cards tell parents and voters how their schools are doing, choice gives them the leverage to act" (U.S. Department of Education, 1991, p. 22). America 2000 also recommends that

individual test scores be used for college admissions and employment. S. 1141, Title III, Part A, provides for advanced instruction for teachers in the five core subjects.

In the United Kingdom, control of the curriculum was decisively transferred from the LEAs and individual schools to the national government. Sections 1-25 of the 1988 Act set forth a new national curriculum. This national curriculum is quite comprehensive in scope and very detailed. It encompasses ten subject areas: English (and Welsh in Wales), math, science, history, geography, technology, art, music, physical education and (for secondary students), foreign language. Assessment followed, rather than preceded, determination of the curriculum. Attainment targets and assessment arrangements to measure student progress at ages 7, 11, 14, and 16 are being built into the national curriculum. Results of assessments of individual children are given to the children's parents. Aggregated assessment results for schools will be published for ages 11, 14 and 16. In addition to the ten subjects for which the curriculum will be controlled by the DES, the Act requires acts of worship and religious education "of a broadly Christian character" (Maclure, 1988, p. 4), the content of which is to be determined at the local level.

The major provisions of S. 1141 and the Education Reform Act of 1988 are thus broadly similar, although there are also important differences. Britain's educational reform is designed to be much more centrally controlled and uniform

throughout England and Wales (with modifications for Scotland and Northern Ireland). Britain's reform legislation is better integrated conceptually and operationally, with each element closely tied to the others, whereas S. 1141 leaves open the possibility that, in any given state, district or school, any one element of the America 2000 strategy could be in operation without the other elements.

Research Findings

The empirical research literature on parental choice in the United States is limited, with many key issues as yet unresolved (Maddaus, 1990). Furthermore, the available studies have been conducted in a wide variety of settings, each with its own distinctive choice program. Despite differences in political systems and cultures, the similarities between the Bush and Thatcher plans suggest that we might learn some things about how the Bush plan would operate if fully implemented in Peoria by looking at what researchers have found in Exeter, England or Dundee, Scotland that we might not learn by looking at research findings from Chicago!

Perhaps the most central question with respect to the Bush plan is whether, given the opportunity to choose and given information about student achievement aggregated on a school by school basis, parents would select the school in their area that had the highest test scores. Bush assumes that they would, but research studies in the U.S. are nearly silent on this specific point. One study (Nault and

Uchitelle, 1982) concluded that "The parents... were attentive to qualitative differences in the instructional and interpersonal environments established in the schools, and selected the school that seemed to offer their child greater opportunity for progress ....reported achievement levels alone were not sufficient criteria on which to base a decision" (p. 95). This was, however, a college community, and thus unrepresentative of the nation as a whole.

Most of the U.S. studies look at the extent to which "academic quality" or "academic standards" (both poorly defined terms) are considerations in parents' choices. Some studies (Convey, 1986; Darling-Hammond and Kirby, 1985; Gratiot, 1980; Nelson, 1988; Williams, Hancher and Hutner, 1983) conclude that academic quality/standards is the most important factor in school choice. However, three of these studies (Convey, Gratiot and Nelson) dealt primarily or exclusively with private schools. There are also U.S. studies that have concluded that non-academic considerations are more important for many families. The Alum Rock voucher demonstration study (Bridge and Blackman, 1978) is perhaps the most important of these, although its sole question regarding parents' reasons for choice was flawed and it failed to explore the Mexican-American cultural context that shaped the perspectives of many Alum Rock parents. Other studies (Clerico, 1983; Maddaus, 1988; Slaughter and Schneider, 1986) have found that parents were more concerned with the well-being of their children in social, emotional

and spiritual as well as academic respects. Again, two of these three studies (Clerico and Slaughter and Schneider) involved private schools.

British research studies are not conclusive on this issue either, although a great deal more evidence on this point should become available in the next several years as results of assessments under the national curriculum in England become available. In the first study since the 1988 Act, Hughes, Wikeley and Nash (1990b) interviewed 141 parents in southwest England whose children had just entered primary school. Of these, 98 chose the local school and 43 a non-local school. In response to the question "Why did you choose your child's school?" (multiple responses allowed), "locality" (56.0%) was the reason most frequently given, followed by "reputation/recommendation" (46.8%), "impressed on visit" (27.0%), "size of school" (17.7%) and "ethos of school" (16.3%). On further probing, the researchers did get one comment about meeting the needs of children who were not in the "middle ability" and another comment regarding reading. But the evidence from this study suggests that at the beginning of primary school, academics were less important than location, community ties and moral values.

For now, most of the available research involves studies of Scotland under the 1981 Act. For example, Echols, McPherson and Wilms (1990) found that choice within the state sector involved a net move toward the older and more prestigious schools, and that "choosers were also found

disproportionately in schools of above-average pupil SES and above-average attainment" (p. 215).

But the most direct and relevant findings are from a study by Adler, Petch and Tweedie (1989; see also Petch, 1986; Raab and Adler, 1987), also in Scotland under the 1981 Act. They asked parents in four cities whose children were entering secondary school to select the four most important reasons for their choice of school from a list of 32 possible items, one of which was "the school has a better examination record". This item ranked fourth in one city, but was tied for eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth on the list in the other three cities. In all four cities, the examination item trailed behind the top ~~three~~ four items, which were "we think our child would be happier there", "our child prefers the school" and "it is easier to get to school". (pp. 133-134) Adler et al. also note that although school information booklets, which contain examination scores, were frequently cited as information sources, very few parents (2%-16%, depending on the city) obtained more than one booklet, and no more than 4% obtained three booklets or more. Even those obtaining more than one booklet seem not to have made any rigorous comparison of examination results. Adler et al. conclude that their evidence provides "little support to exponents of a market ideology" (p. 134).

A related question to that of what criteria choosers use is whether most people choose at all. Two studies of representative samples of Americans via telephone survey

(Darling-Hammond and Kirby, 1985; Williams, Hancher and Hutner, 1983) found that only 20-25% of public school parents say they consider other schools at the time of first enrollment, although 50-55% say they consider public schools in their choice of residence. However, both surveys included people who had a diversity of options available to them, as well as others who had no options whatever. More centralized policies in the United Kingdom would result in more uniformity of options to people in different communities.

Adler, Petch and Tweedie (1989) studied official data on parents' requests for schools other than the schools where they resided in nine of the twelve local education authorities in Scotland under the provisions of the 1981 Act. They report that approximately 20% of urban parents with children entering primary and secondary schools requested transfers to schools other than the ones to which the children were assigned, whereas in five predominantly rural LEAs only about 3% of parents made such requests. Thus, about 80% of urban parents and up to 97% of rural parents appeared to be satisfied with the schools to which their children are assigned on the basis of residence. It is unlikely that many parents were discouraged from applying, since most requests analyzed for this study were granted. Echols, McPherson and Willms (1990) found the same urban-rural differences, and point to the cost of transportation as a decisive factor.

Hughes, Wikeley and Nash (1990b) took a more direct

approach, asking parents to what extent they viewed themselves as consumers of education. Nearly half the parents interviewed (45%) "found the question puzzling or difficult to answer." (p. 14) Only 11 percent of the responses were categorized as "very much so", with another 34 percent "to some extent".

Another question concerns whether students from more advantaged or less advantaged backgrounds benefit more from school choice programs. Advocates of choice (Paulu, 1989) point out that less advantaged students have the most to gain from choice plans which allow them to leave schools they could not leave through other means, whereas critics of choice (Bastian, 1990) fear that less advantaged students will be left behind in the worst schools, while students whose parents have more money, social networks and/or personal skills escape to better schools. The evidence in the U.S. so far indicates that perhaps both are correct. Moore and Davenport (1990) argue that school choice programs in major cities function as a "new, improved sorting machine", allowing some low income and minority students to take part in programs that might once have been available only to the white middle class, but screening out students who have not performed well in school and/or who are unable to work their way through a complex application process. Wells, Crain and Uchitelle (1991) argue that even without such barriers, low income and minority students are unlikely to participate in school choice programs if their parents

are socially isolated and feel alienated and powerless.

British studies point out two other parental behavior patterns that have impacts on the equity outcomes. One is the tendency of many choosers, especially at the elementary school level, to confine their choices to relatively homogeneous areas. Adler, Petch and Tweedie (1989) report that 85% of the primary placement requests in the Scottish cities of Dundee and Edinburgh were to adjacent schools within relatively homogeneous sections of the city, although there was a slight tendency to transfer from areas with a high level of social deprivation to areas that were less deprived. This appears to be consistent with the some parents' reasons for their placement requests, such as avoidance of "rowdy, rough children, bad language" (p. 123). The 15% of all moves that were to non-adjacent schools were almost entirely from working-class to middle-class areas.

Another problem is the possibility that some white parents would try to use choice programs in order to avoid schools with substantial minority enrollments. Some white British parents have requested placements out of predominantly immigrant schools, and different government agencies have taken opposing stands on whether such requests should be approved (Lashley, 1987). This use of school choice programs is similar to the "white flight" to the suburbs identified by Coleman, Kelly and Moore (1975).

The aspect of choice that has received the least attention in American research is the attitudes and behavior

of school administrators under school choice programs. There are some theoretical analyses of this topic (Kerchner, 1988; Crow, 1991), but no empirical studies.

Hughes, Wikeley and Nash (1990a) have reported the findings of a survey of nearly 100 primary head teachers (i.e., principals) in southwest England. About one-quarter of the head teachers interviewed were actively marketing their schools, while another quarter were engaged in passive marketing (i.e. "trying to spread the good name of the school"). About half were not involved in marketing efforts at all, mostly because their schools were already full to capacity. Only one head teacher in five had introduced a new policy, such as a uniform, because parents wanted it. Most were more concerned about parental apathy than parental pressure. Head teachers said that they were increasingly thinking of parents as consumers, although some preferred to think of parents as partners or of children as consumers. One summed it up by observing that under the government's choice program "the child will be seen as a product, not a person. That would be very sad" (p. 21).

A final issue is that of religion. The U.S. Supreme Court's recent interpretations of the Constitution have barred most government aid to private schools, so there is no U.S. research literature on publically funded choice of sectarian schools. But with changes in the membership of the Supreme Court, this policy could change. In the United Kingdom, cooperative relationships between church and state

have been relatively harmonious and arguably mutually beneficial for the most part, but the 1988 Act has created tension over the issue of diocesan control of church-sponsored schools. One much publicized case has put the Secretary of State for Education in the unenviable position of either opposing the authority of the Cardinal Archbishop and the Pope over Catholic schools, or of failing to apply the provisions of the 1988 act to Catholic schools despite a clear expression of intent to do so during Parliamentary debate.

Conclusion

Despite significant differences between the United States and the United Kingdom, much can still be learned from comparisons of educational reform policies in the two nations. Valuable research has already been conducted on the policies adopted by the Thatcher government during the 1980s, and more can be expected in the near future.

Thatcher's Education Reform Act of 1988, as well as Bush's America 2000 proposals, constitute large scale social experiments. The idea of accountability to the marketplace reflected in both the American and British reform programs has a double meaning. On the one hand, there is the notion of consumer sovereignty and educational entrepreneurship, of supply and demand, with each parent (or student?) cast in the role of a consumer examining a wide variety of schools in search of the one that best satisfies their individual tastes, and each school seeking to supply what the consumers

want (Chubb and Moe, 1990). On the other hand, there is the notion of controlling the curriculum to prepare students for future employment in the competitive global capitalist economy, which tends to narrow the acceptable range of individual tastes in education and institute a new version of the "one best system".

Existing research suggests that the assumptions on which these experiments are based are faulty, that neither students and their parents nor educators behave in the ways that conservative theory requires. There is a possibility that new policies will lead to new behaviors, but it remains to be seen whether this will happen. Furthermore, there could be much debate over whether that would be desirable for society (Jonathan, 1990; Walford, 1990).

The available evidence does not, in the judgment of this researcher, justify a total commitment to making schools accountable to the marketplace in either of the senses outlined above. At most, Congress should encourage states and local districts to develop carefully designed school choice programs that take into account the problems identified in the existing research literature. Such programs should be carefully and thoroughly evaluated, and modified as necessary to avoid harm and increase benefits, especially for the least advantaged people of our society. In the meanwhile, we as a nation should make every effort to learn from existing programs, including those of other countries under-going similar changes.

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